

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-08

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 IO-06 SP-02 PM-03 NSCE-00
DODE-00 L-01 INR-05 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIE-00
ACDA-10 SSO-00 INRE-00 /051 W
-----053074 101100Z /10 S

O P 100942Z MAR 78

FM AMEMBASSY BONN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6606

INFO AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PWRIS

USMISSION USBERLIN

USMISSION USNATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BONN 04356

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINS, PQNT, GW, GE, UR, US

SUBJECT: "DER SPIEGEL" PLANS ARTICLE ON VON BERG

ARREST AND GBR LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS

REFS: (A) BONN 3067 (LIMDIS)
(B) BONN 1222 (EXDIS)

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE WEST GERMAN NEWS MAGAZINE "DER SPIEGEL" INTENDS TO PUBLISH IN ITS MARCH 20 ISSUE AN ARTICLE CONCERNING THE ARREST BY THE GDR SECRET POLICE OF HERMANN VON BERG, AN EXPERIENCED, BEHIND-THE-SCENES GDR REPRESENTATIVE IN CONTACTS WITH THE FRG. ACCORDING TO A DRAFT OF THE "SPIEGEL" ARTICLE, WHICH THE EXASSY HAS RECEIVED THROUGH VERY CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES, VON BERG'S ARREST WAS ORDERED BY GDR STATE AND PARTY CHIEF

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ERICH HONECKER AS A WARNING TO AN INTERNAL OPPOSITION FACTION HEADED BY PRIME MINISTER WILLI STOPH. "SPIEGEL" CLAIMS THAT THE GDR LEADERSHIP IS EXPERIENCING A "BITTER STRUGGLE" FOR CONTROL BETWEEN A COMMUNIST-ORIENTED HONECKER FACTION AND AN ECONOMICALLY MORE CONSERVATIVE GROUPING UNDER STOPH. THE ARREST OF VON BERG, CONSIDERED A STOPH PROTEGE, IS INTERPRETED

AS EVIDENCE THAT HONECKER RETAINS, AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT, SUFFICIENT SUPPORT AT HOME AND AMONG THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP TO MAINTAIN HIS POSITION.

"SPIEGE'S" EXPLANATION OF THE REASONS FOR VON BERG'S ARREST IS THAT HE WAS CHOSEN AS AN EXAMPLE TO THE REST OF THE STOPH FACTION SIMPLY BECAUSE HE WAS CLOSE ENOUGH TO STOPH WITHOUT BEING SO WELL KNOWN AS TO CAUSE AN INTERNATIONAL FUSS. NO MENTION IS MADE OF REPORTS CIRCULATING IN TOP FRG CIRCLES THAT VON BERG HIMSELF WROTE AT LEAST PORTIONS OF THE INTERNAL GDR OPPOSITION MANIFESTO WHICH APPEARED IN "DER SPIEGEL" DURING THE FIRST HALF OF JANUARY. IN FACT, VON BERG IS PORTRAYED AS THE EVER FAITHFUL PARTY MEMBER, NOT: "A DISSIDENT LIKE ROBERT HAVEMANN, (OR) AN OPPORTUNIST LONER LIKE RUDOLF BAHR, AND STILL LESS A MEMBER OF A RESISTANCE GROUP LIKE THE FOUNDERS OF THE LEAGUE OF DEMOCRATIC COMMUNISTS." END SUMMARY

1. VERY CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES HAVE PASSED ON TO THE EMBASSY A DRAFT OF AN ARTICLE DISCLOSING THE ARREST OF HERMANN VON BERG WHICH "DER SPIEGEL" TENTATIVELY PLANS TO PUBLISH IN ITS MARCH 20 EDITION. VON BERG IS WELL KNOWN AMONG TOP FRG LEADERSHIP CIRCLES AS AN UNOFFICIAL, HIGH-LEVEL GDR SPOKESMAN ON INNER-GERMAN RELATIONS (REF A). "SPIEGEL" WRITES THAT IT IS OBVIOUS FROM

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VON BERG'S ARREST BY THE GDR SECRET POLICE THAT THE GDR'S COMMUNIST PARTY, THE SED* IS UNDERGOING "SEVERE CONVULSIONS" CAUSED BY A "BITTER POLICY STRUGGLE" IN RECENT MONTHS AMONG ITS LEADERSHIP.

2. "SPIEGEL" DESCRIBES IN SOME DETAIL THE CAREER OF VON BERG, WHOSE OVERT POSITION IS CHAIRMAN OF THE ECONOMICS DEPARTMENT AT HUMBOLDT UNIVERSITY IN EAST BERLIN. EARLY ON, HE GAINED THE ATTENTION OF STOPH, AT THAT TIME DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, WHOSE PROTEGE HE SOON BECAME. AS A STUDENT, HE BECAME FRIENDS WITH THE PRESENT FRG PLENIPOTENTIARY IN WEST BERLIN, DIETRICH SPANGENBERG. THROUGH SPANGENBERG, VON BERG MADE CONTACT IN 1966 WITH THE THEN GOVERNING MAYOR OF BERLIN, WILLY BRANDT, AND HIS PRESS SPOKESMAN, EGON BAHR. VON BERG IS ALSO SAID TO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN, AMONG OTHER THINGS, THE 1963 VISITS AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE SENAT AND THE GDR, GDR CONTACTS WITH THE ERHARD GOVERNMENT ON A POSSIBLE TRANSIT AGREEMENT, AND THE 1966 PROPOSAL FOR AN EXCHANGE OF SPEAKERS BETWEEN THE SED AND SPD. AS ONE OF HIS MORE RECENT MISSIONS, VON BERG IS REPORTED TO HAVE HAD TALKS WITH AMERICAN DIPLOMATS ON THE

EXCHANGE OF AMBASSADORS BETWEEN THE US AND THE GDR AFTER
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS.

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ACDA-10 SSO-00 INRE-00 /051 W
-----053018 101102Z /10 S

O P 100942Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BONN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6607
INFO AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY
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3. AS FOR HOW VON BERG CAME TO BE IN HIS PRESENT
PREDICAMENT, "SPIEGEL" WRITES THAT WHEN THE SPD ENTERED
THE FRG GOVERNMENT IN 1966, PRIME MINISTER STOPH SAW A
CHANCE OF SUCCESS FOR MOSCOW'S IDEA OF A CONFERENCE ON
SECURITY IN EUROPE. A PREREQUISITE FOR SUCH A CONFERENCE
WAS AN IMPROVEMENT IN FRG-GDR RELATIONS. THIS, HOWEVER,
WAS OPPOSED BY BOTH THEN GDR PARTY CHIEF ULRICH
AND HIS HEIR-APPARENT, HONECKER, WHO FEARED THAT
IMPROVED RELATIONS WOULD CAUSE INTERNAL GDR INSTABILITY.
DURING THIS PERIOD, VON BERG WAS A MAJOR PARTICIPANT
IN THE MOVES THE GDR DID MAKE TO IMPROVE INNER-GERMAN
RELATIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, HE ACTED AS COURIER FOR THE
LETTER FROM STOPH TO FRG CHANCELLOR KIESINGER.

4. IN 1969 THE SPD AND WILLY BRANDT BECAME THE SENIOR
PARTNER IN A RULING COALITION WITH THE FDP. VON BERG'S
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CONTACTS WITH THE BRANDT TEAM INCREASED HIS IMPORTANCE AS A SECRET REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE GDR. THEN, IN MAY 1971, HONECKER REPLACED ULRICH AS HEAD OF THE SED. ACCORDING TO SPIEGEL, HONECKER GAINED MOSCOW'S APPROVAL TO TAKE THE GDR REINS WHEN HE PROMISED TO FOLLOW MOSCOW'S POSITION ON INNER-GERMAN RELATIONS NO MATTER WHICH WAY IT MIGHT TURN. EVEN THOUGH HONECKER AND STOPH WERE RIVALS, VON BERG STILL PERFORMED IMPORTANT FUNCTIONS BECAUSE MOSCOW WAS PUSHING FOR AN IMPROVEMENT IN FRG-GDR RELATIONS.

5. THINGS HAD CHANGED BY 1974. THE MAJOR INNER-GERMAN AGREEMENTS HAD BEEN SIGNED AND THE EARLY EUPHORIA IN SOME SECTIONS OF THE SPD HAD FADED. BRANDT RESIGNED AS CHANCELLOR AS A RESULT OF THE GUILLAUME SPY SCANDAL. HIS REPLACEMENT, HELMUT SCHMIDT, RELIED ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY ON SPD BUNDESTAG CAUCUS CHAIRMAN HERBERT WEHNER FOR ADVICE ON INNER-GERMAN AFFAIRS. WEHNER HAD HIS OWN CONTACTS IN EAST BERLIN, BUT RATHER THAN LEADING TO STOPH THEY WERE TO HONECKER, WHOM HE KNEW FROM THE 1930'S WHEN BOTH WERE COMMUNIST LEADERS IN THE SAARLAND.

6. "SPIEGEL" CLAIMS THAT WEHNER WAS JEALOUS OF BRANDT'S AND BAHR'S CONTACTS TO EAST BERLIN, SO HE USED HIS OWN CHANNEL TO HONECKER AT ALL TIMES. THIS AND THE DEMOTION OF STOPH FROM PRIME MINISTER TO CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS EFFECTIVELY TOOK VON BERG OUT OF THE PICTURE.

7. VON BERG'S FORTUNES REVIVED IN 1976 WHEN STOPH REGAINED HIS POSITION AS PRIME MINISTER. "SPIEGEL"
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SAYS HONECKER REINSTATED ECONOMIC EXPERT STOPH TO COMBAT DETERIORATING ECONOMIC CONDITIONS WHICH HAD BEEN CAUSED BY HONECKER'S CONSUMERIST POLICY. STOPH IMMEDIATELY ASSIGNED VON BERG TO REPRESENT THE GDR IN CEMA, WHERE HE WAS TO CONCERN HIMSELF ESPECIALLY WITH CEMA NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE EC. BOTH THE HONECKER AND STOPH Factions FEARED THAT THESE TALKS MIGHT EVENTUALLY RESULT IN THE LOSS BY THE GDR OF ITS ROLE AS A "SILENT PARTNER" IN THE EC, AN ADVANTAGE IT ENJOYS OVER OTHER CEMA STATES BECAUSE OF THE DUTY-FREE INNER-GERMAN TRADE.

8. ON THE BASIS OF THIS COMMON CONCERN, THE STOPH TEAM HAD HOPED TO BE ABLE TO INITIATE A COMPREHENSIVE REFORM OF THE ECONOMY. HONECKER, HOWEVER, CONTINUED HIS

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SSO-00 INRE-00 SP-02 /051 W
-----053024 101104Z/10

O P 100942Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BONN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6608
INFO AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY
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"HAND-TO-MOUTH" ECONOMIC POLICIES AND MADE PROMISES WHICH ONLY FURTHER HEIGHTENED THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE GDR POPULATION. THE SITUATION BECAME SO DANGEROUS, IN THE EYES OF THE STOPH FACTION, THAT AN EFFORT WAS MADE TO TOPPLE HONECKER.

9. LATE LAST FALL WAS CHOSEN AS THE MOST PROPITIOUS TIME TO MOVE AGAINST HONECKER. IT HAD BEEN LEARNED THAT THE CHANCES WERE SLIM THAT BREZHNEV WOULD RECOVER FROM A SERIOUS ILLNESS AND THAT HE WOULD SOON BE REPLACED BY A NEW MAN. AT THIS POINT, A MEMBER OF THE STOPH FACTION, WHICH ALSO ENJOYED EXCELLENT RELATIONS TO THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP, COULD REPLACE HONECKER, LEAVING THE WAY FREE FOR A COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC REFORM. ONE OF THE PREREQUISITES FOR THIS REFORM WAS THAT FRG-GDR RELATIONS BE AT LEAST AS GOOD AS DURING THE HONECKER

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10. BY JANUARY 1978 IT WAS EVIDENT THAT THE ANTI-HONECKER INITIATIVE WAS PREMATURE. BREZHNEV UNEXPECTEDLY RECOVERED; STOPH WAS SUMMONED TO MOSCOW IN STRICTEST CONFIDENTIALITY. THERE HE WAS TOLD THAT CERTAIN CHANGES IN THE GDR'S ECONOMIC POLICY WERE NECESSARY, BUT ALSO THAT THERE WAS NO CAUSE FOR A CHANGE IN PERSONNEL.

11. "SPIEGEL" SAYS THAT WHEN STOPH RETURNED TO BERLIN, HIS PROTEGE, VON BERG, HAD DISAPPEARED. HONECKER, NERVOUS ENOUGH, HAD DEMANDED A VICTIM TO SHOW HIS RIVALS THE LIMITS OF PERMISSIBLE DISAGREEMENT.

12. "SPIEGEL" CONCLUDES ITS ABOVE ACCOUNT BY STATING THAT, IN THE COMING PERIOD, HONECKER'S DECISION ON HOW CLOSELY THESE LIMITS SHOULD BE SET WILL BE INDICATED BY THE FATE OF HERMANN VON BERG.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, ARRESTS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 10 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BONN04356
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780107-1140
Format: TEL
From: BONN
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780384/aaaacthy.tel
Line Count: 303
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: bdb7acc9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 78 BONN 3067, 78 BONN 1222
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 31 mar 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3378724
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: "DER SPIEGEL" PLANS ARTICLE ON VON BERG ARREST AND GBR LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS
TAGS: PGOV, PINS, GE, GC, UR, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/bdb7acc9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014